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E.O. 12958: DECL: 4/10/2018
TAGS: PGOV PREL IR
SUBJECT: NED FELLOWS CAUGHT IN MEDIA CROSSFIRE

CLASSIFIED BY: Ramin Asgard, Acting Director, Iran Regional Presence Office, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

1.(S//NF) Summary: An Iranian-American who resides in Dubai told IRPoff April 9 that he has been simultaneously accused -- by Iranian official sources and US media sources -- of being an agent of the other country. Reportedly, Iranian prime-time evening news announced April 8 the names of Iranians who have been National Endowment for Democracy (NED) fellows, calling them "agents for America." The Iranian-American was among those named. On the same day, Kenneth Timmerman published an on-line article "exposing" an invitation only conference held by the National Iranian-American Council (NIAC) at a US Senate Office building. The Iranian-American, as a NIAC founder, was named in the article and called an Iranian "oil mafia man." Despite the media attention, the Iranian-American is still planning a personal trip to Iran April 10. End Summary.

Iran nightly news

2.(S//NF) An Iranian-American residing in Dubai said April 9 that he is being accused by both countries of being "an agent." According to the AmCit, Iranian nightly news carried a prime time story April 8 naming all previous National Endowment for Democracy (NED) fellows as "American agents." The others fellows mentioned in the report by name include: Ali Afshari, Manouchehr Mohammadi, Dr. Hossein Bashiriyeh, Dr. Ladan Boroumand, Dr. Ramin Jahanbegloo and Dr. Halah Esfandiari. Despite the announcement on Iranian news, the Iranian-American said he still plans to travel to Iran April 10. When asked by IRPoff if this was the right decision given his high profile, the AmCit replied, "when I left Iran and spent months in exile, what I realized is that the longer I stay out, the scarier it gets to return. I guess I worry, but I just don't want to bend to the fear. I do not think anything will happen...I keep wondering if I have let them win by folding shop and letting go. I think if I pay anymore for sins not committed, i.e. if I stay out of Iran when I want to go - I will lose respect for myself."

Timmerman article

3.(SBU) The same day that Iranian nightly news called the Iranian-American an "American agent," various on-line websites carried a story by Kenneth Timmerman titled "Pro-Iran Group Wants Iran Diplomacy." In it, Timmerman "exposes" an invitation

only conference that was reportedly held April 8 by the National Iranian-American Council (NIAC) in a US Senate office building. Discussing NIAC founders, Timmerman quoted a previous article by US-based political analyst Hassan Daioleslam, calling the Iranian-American a member of "Iran's oil mafia" for his former Iran-based company's presumed role in facilitating oil contracts for Norway's Statoil and France's Total.

4.(S//NF) Comment: Since the release of Halah Esfandiari in August 2007, Iranians have appeared to be more at ease when interacting with IRPO. However, with the April 8 public rebuke of NED fellows, we could be headed into another phase of crackdowns. What remains to be seen is whether Iranians facing a possibly more restrictive atmosphere will "bend to the fear," or will take the attitude of this particular Iranian-American despite the potential consequences.

ASGARD